

Taiwan's Wait for \$19 Billion in US-Made Weapons Compounds China Threat

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Taiwan is waiting on the U.S. for nearly \$20 billion worth of arms sales as the gap between the self-ruled island's and China's military capabilities continues to widen.

Just over 57 percent of this backlog is comprised of "traditional" weapons like tanks, U.S. think tank the CATO Institute said on Monday about the \$19.2 billion in weapons still outstanding as of last month. "Asymmetric" weapons like HIMARS rocket launchers make up 28 percent, and "munitions" account for the remaining 14.9 percent.

American industrial capacity has been overextended by arms shipments to Ukraine to aid in its defense against Russia, as well as to Israel for its offensive in Gaza. The U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) has said getting the approved weapons platforms into Taiwan's hands is a priority.

Some analysts have said not enough is being done to gird Taiwan for a potential invasion as China, which has vowed to annex the self-ruled island—through force if necessary—continues its rapid military buildup.

A DOD spokesperson told *Newsweek* in November that complaints of the "backlog" of Taiwan's purchases is a "misperception premised on the false assumption" that the date the DOD notifies Congress of intended weapons sales marks the "starting point for production and delivery."

"Industry does not start manufacturing until defense companies receive a signed contract and initial deposit, which often takes place months or even years after the congressional notification," the spokesperson said, stressing that the department continued to prioritize timely delivery of Taiwan's contracted military purchases.

"U.S. provision of military aid for China's Taiwan region seriously violates the one-China principle and the stipulations of the three China-US joint communiqués," Liu Pengyu, a spokesperson with the Chinese Embassy, told *Newsweek* Wednesday, citing Washington's past agreements with Beijing that helped form the basis for relations between the countries.

"The Taiwan question is the very core of China's core interests and the first red line that must not be crossed in the China-U.S. relationship," he said, calling on the U.S. to abide by standing bilateral agreements and to "stop behavior that raises tensions in the 100-mile Taiwan Strait."

For decades, the U.S.'s policy on Taiwan has been rooted, in part, on the Taiwan Relations Act. This legislation requires Washington to "make available to Taiwan such defense articles and

defense services in such quantity as may be necessary to enable Taiwan to maintain a sufficient self-defense capability."

An order of 66 F-16V fighter jets account almost half Taiwan's awaited weapons purchases in the traditional category. Another sizable chunk is comprised of 108 Abrams tanks ordered in 2019, a third of which Taipei is expected to take delivery of this year.

Many defense analysts have pointed out tanks and other traditional platforms would have limited utility in a war in which the world's largest military.

"Tanks are relatively large targets, so the Taiwanese military needs to train to protect them well, Raymond Kuo, a political scientist at the RAND Corp. think tank, told *Newsweek*. Tanks, and Abrams tanks in particular, are also fuel intensive, and Taiwanese forces must make "a proper logistics train available to ensure these platforms can get to where they're most needed."

The vehicles could, however, excel in certain roles, such as "a quick reaction force to destroy Chinese beachheads in case of invasion," Kuo said.

On Tuesday, the U.S. Senate voted on \$95 billion in military aid for Ukraine, Israel and Taiwan. The House of Representatives has yet to vote on its version of the bill, which faces an uphill battle in the lower house.